

Field Notes

In an effort to share some of the natural history observations made during the bottom trawl survey, we have requested that the Chief Scientists on each part of the cruise comment on some of the more interesting catches that were brought aboard the *R/V ALBATROSS IV*.

Butterfish and Searobins

Leg I of the spring survey faced weather conditions that forced us to take shelter for a few days. It was interesting to see a good butterfish tow, although I remember much larger and more frequent captures in the early 90's. We also had a 60-100 fathom station with a nice catch of large buckler dories. This year our searobin catch consisted of northern and striped, and the spiny searobins we saw over wintering in the Mid Atlantic Bight in 2002 and 2003 were not detected during this survey.

Waves and Weather

Rough weather and light catches on the US side of the Hague line characterized the Georges Bank part of the survey this spring. An average of 40 pounds of fish per tow was found in the area between Closed Areas I and II with lighter tows in the Nantucket Shoal area. Most of the catches in these areas were composed of sea ravens, long horn sculpins, ocean pout, little and winter skates and a few windowpane flounder. Several commercial fishers operating in the same general vicinity reported abnormally light catches.

Once in the southern part of Closed Area II, yellowtail and haddock began to show up in size and numbers. On the Canadian side of the Hague Line, catches increased to over 200 pounds per tow as more haddock and cod (which had already spawned) showed up in almost every tow. One tow brought up 20 different species...something that normally happens on stations near Cape Hatteras.

Haddock

The substantial catches of Georges Bank haddock during the spring bottom trawl survey again demonstrated the progress that has been made in rebuilding this stock at low fishing mortality rates. Spring 2005 survey catches were comprised of a healthy mix of haddock age classes, ranging from age-1 to age-8 and older. The 2004 year class was abundant in several areas and appeared to be more abundant than the autumn 2004 survey suggested. The 2005 spring survey marked the second consecutive year that the NEFSC has collected haddock fecundity data to investigate how haddock egg size and egg quantity changes as fish grow.

Atlantic Halibut

We caught 19 Atlantic halibut this spring in the Gulf of Maine, including an individual that weighed 47 pounds and was 47 inches long. While these numbers aren't very high, it does represent an increase over what we have seen in previous years. On this same leg last year we saw a couple of large Atlantic halibut, however we only caught a total of 4 individuals.

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